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Casting doubts on Web Media. Can Internet Radio make a difference in the Greek Case?

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Abstract:

The paper presents and summarizes the basic features of the radio landscape in Greece. Research shows that like most media in the country, radio developed upon a hierarchy of political, economic and cultural considerations, affected by complexes of political and economic interests. In this case, radio is not a simple "pipeline", but rather an instrument that performs a dual function: it promotes the complexes of political and economic interests while it contributes to the construction of ideology and culture. Previous studies indicate that this double function is performed in multifarious, sophisticated and indirect ways. A complicated approach therefore is needed, and in this sense, the paper examines radio within the wider context of the media landscape in this country, setting out an example for the operation of the medium in small European markets.

Based on this review, the paper goes on to analyze the challenge that the webcasting radio represents in the local media landscape. To study the probability of net-only radio making a difference in a media environment like the Greek one, the paper discusses the aspects that should be included in a future research, suggesting that this approach might be used in other similar cases as well.

Keywords: Internet radio, webcasting radio, net-only radio, Greece

Introduction

This paper sets out to examine the basic components of web-radio research in the Greek landscape. For this reason not only does it paint the general characteristics of the latter, but goes on to examine the particular conditions for the development of a research project. The availability and content-characteristics of news and music output that address the Greek audiences at large on the cyberspace remain this paper's major consideration. Thus, after drawing the main features of web radio research, the paper first delineates the hierarchy of the politico-economic interests that affect radio production on traditional Greek radio as part of the international communication system. For this reason the paper employs an interdisciplinary research approach based on history, sociology, economics, law and politics³. The very same approach is used to explain the development – or, indeed, the voluminous absence – of communication policies that serve both the public interest of the audiences and the economic growth of the radio industry. Finally, the paper goes on to discuss the

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³ For the methodological considerations of this undertaking see Barboutis, 2010: 177-8.

dimensions most adequate to be included in research on the operation of internet radio in Greece and small European countries alike.

Complexities and ambivalence of webcasting radio

Compared to a station that operates exclusively on the Internet (i.e. to a webcasting station) a radio station simulcasting its program (i.e. broadcasting over the air and over the Internet), is in an advantageous position as a business (Ren & Chan-Olmsted, 2004): in terms of branding, it is an already established company which – in terms of regulations – operates in a more or less stable environment. In this case, the Internet is used as a complementary or secondary revenue source. A webcasting station, on the other hand, operates in an unregulated environment as the Internet is the sole channel for the distribution of its content and consequently the main source of its revenues. The only regulation applied in most cases is music licensing. Analysis shows that the simulcasting radio stations use this medium as a *side channel* for content distribution to reach a *secondary* demographic by streaming on the Internet their program without any modification. At the same time, however, they give rise to yet another competitor of their aired program that might become a “cannibalizing force” (Ha & Ganahl, 2004; Gartley & Smith, 2006; Baker, 2009), a situation unknown – of course – to the webcasting stations (see

Figure 1).

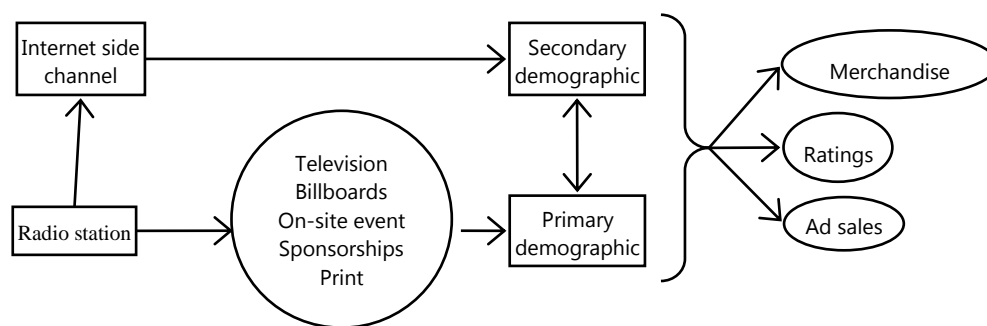


Figure 1. Internet radio as a side channel (adapted from Gartley & Smith, 2006)

Some researchers (cf. Ren & Chan-Olmsted, 2004) hold that the webcasting stations are more motivated in certain, less conservative directions. This is because (a) they operate in an unregulated environment, (b) they have at their disposal only one outlet to brand, communicate and generate revenues, and (c) they also have to compete with a much wider range of choices available on the Internet. Thus, they are expected to be the innovators or the early adopters⁴ who implement original, unprecedented models of management, provide content alternative to the aired one, and encourage interactivity to propel audience loyalty by enhancing, at the same time, audience participation and empowerment. Hence, compared to the simulcasting radio, the webcasting radio stations appear to be considerably more radical and progressive (cf. Ren & Chan-Olmsted, 2004; Baker, 2009). Given all this, and taking also into account that the traditional radio did not live up to expectations for a wider democratization of public communication and culture⁵, it is understandable why the webcasting radio inspired a lot of new hopes. These may be grouped just as David Hendy (2000) pointed out several years ago: “more choice, more democracy, and more interactivity”. Consequently, there are several good reasons to make the distinction between, on the one

⁴ For definitions of these categories, see Rogers, 1983, chapter 7 (pp. 241-270).

⁵ For example, see the well-known expectations expressed by Brecht (1979 [1927]).

hand, the stations webcasting radio content, and on the other, the radio stations either simulcasting their program on the Internet or just broadcasting it over the air.

As can be seen in the relevant literature throughout the decade (Hendy, 2000; Ha & Ganahl, 2004; Ren & Chan-Olmsted, 2004; Gartley & Smith, 2006; Baker, 2009), a commonly accepted terminology for this distinction has not been established. In that vein, Baker (2009; 2011) – for example – defines the Internet-only based stations as *net-only stations* and the terrestrial radio stations that stream their program online she defines as *radio online*, while Ha and Ganahl (2004) make the distinction between “*clicks-and-bricks*” and “*pure-play Webcasters*”. Anyway, researchers agree that the webcasters (i.e. Internet-only stations) should be distinguished from the traditional terrestrial radio – called also *over-the-air* (OTA) or *RF* radio – that may broadcast on the Internet (in which case they might be called “simulcasters”).

As we have shown in details elsewhere (Baltzis, 2010), research on the net-only or webcasting radio is well-developed. Several researchers describe or examine the challenges and the potential of webcasting radio for audiences and producers in accordance with the new possibilities it offers (see for example Hendy, 2000; Tacchi, 2000; Field & Hartel, 2001; Priestman, 2004; Gartley & Smith, 2006; Kibby, 2006; Baker, 2009; Baltzis, 2010; Baker, 2011). Priestman (2004) analyzes various aspects of the web radio by focusing on the features of narrowcasting and access on demand: webcasting radio makes programs available in real time to a global audience, while the traditional radio is more or less domestic in scope; it may be used to pool content in collaborative productions without geographical limits; it may be used also to extend the “life of the programmes” by making them available on demand at any time; finally, it may be used as an alternative grassroots medium for news and entertainment, due to its low cost compared to traditional radio. Besides, it offers a much wider range of options for analyzing audience preferences to provide customized and personalized content (Field & Hartel, 2001; Gartley & Smith, 2006; Kibby, 2006), as well as encouraging interaction (Kibby, 2006) and “niche alliances of virtual communities” (Baker, 2011) of producers and audiences or of radio *prosumers*⁶. In short – as Tacchi (2000) explains – the Internet dismantles barriers of space and time as well as the divide between production and consumption of radio content.

In terms of the musical content, the constraints of the playlists and powerlists repertoire become meaningless: listeners have access to a virtually unlimited range of genres and styles and to music that would never be broadcast on the airwaves, while the producers have access to vast searchable and customizable databases (Priestman, 2004; Gartley & Smith, 2006). From a business point of view, audience fragmentation – conceived by the traditional radio on a local basis – needs also to be redefined because both audience and webcasting radio content are becoming global.

Some researchers, however, suggest that there are several constraints limiting the potential of the net-only radio for enhanced choice, democracy, and interactivity (Hendy, 2000). For the users, net-only radio is more expensive compared to a common radio receiver, since a computer powerful enough and software are needed as well as a subscription to some Internet Service Provider for fast and stable connection (cf. Menduni, 2007). There are also additional higher non-monetary costs: a specific knowledge is needed to operate a computer, use the software and navigate on the Internet; further literacy and time are necessary to look for net-only radio and make use of the eventual personalization or customization options, let alone to create an acceptable web radio programme⁷. The profile, then, of the net-only radio audience (or *prosumer*) is quite different compared to the profile of the user of a common radio receiver (cf. also Menduni, 2007; Baker, 2011). While there are radio receivers even in the less favored social environments and in the most distant places, this is not the case with webcasting radio. Certainly, its audiences do not constitute a majority of the population and they are by far smaller than those of the traditional radio. Besides, researchers like Priestman (2004) suggest that the current

⁶ Coined by Alvin Toffler and formed by the words *producer* and *consumer*, the term suggests that these roles merge. See more details in Blättel-Mink & Hellmann, 2010.

⁷ Even students in Schools of Journalism and Mass Media have to be trained in coping with technical and other peculiarities of the medium.

music license regimes together with the ever-increasing use of programme automation might lead a large section of radio towards closer integration with the interests of the mainstream music industries. This might also affect content diversity. Analyzing the Yahoo! web radio (*Y!Music*), Kibby (2006) found rather high non-monetary costs of personalization and interactivity. She also found that the complexity of the available options does not necessarily entail more freedom for the user, especially when the system imposes predefined music classifications. In addition, complex systems for personalization, customization, and interactivity, higher costs of providing access to bigger audiences and creating original content, obtaining licenses for music transmission, and using large content databases may be affordable by bigger operators, but not by small grassroots organizations or groups of enthusiasts. Finally, it remains to be seen what the impact of the current crisis on the affordability and the economics of the webcasting radio will be.

The economics of the webcasting radio and the requirements of its use and operation suggest that the realization of its promises is more complicated than it looked like at its inception in the mid-nineties. This brief overview shows that net-only radio raises a number of issues concerning its potential for further democratization of the communication at large. Moreover, as we have shown elsewhere in details (Baltzis, 2010), skepticism also prevails regarding the functions of the medium in the production of culture. All these issues call for further investigation to evaluate and understand the extent to which webcasting radio can make a difference in terms of its potential as an alternative medium in cases like the Greek one – and (perhaps) in cases of other small countries in the European periphery as well. A systemic and critical comparison with the traditional or simulcasting radio is part of such an investigation.

Research has shown that in the Greek case the presence of traditional radio broadcasters on the Internet is limited to simulcasting while very often their websites are designed as promotional handouts (Baltzis, Hahn & Hargitai, 2006; Arampatzis, 2007). Probably, there are no major differences compared with other countries of the European periphery. Analysis also shows that after media de-monopolization in this country, the political dependence of traditional radio on the State has been replaced by dependence on complexes of economic and political interests, with negative effects on the institutional framework and its implementation, as well as on the quality of the available content (cf. Zaharopoulos, 2003; Sims, 2003; Sims, 2007). Additional research has shown that intense competition, as a distinctive feature of this case, does not seem to result in product differentiation or improved quality of the services provided, due to low-cost strategies followed by traditional radio stations (Agas, Tsourvakas & Pekaiti, 2009). At the same time, community or social radio is almost unknown with only a few exceptions⁸. In these circumstances, pluralism, inclusion, participation and empowerment remain under question. In short, democratization as a function of the traditional radio is questionable for both sectors of the content provided: information and entertainment. The distinction, then, and a critical comparison between webcasting and traditional radio (either simulcasting or not) are interesting from both an academic and a political point of view.

The off-line Greek radio landscape: history and policy, politics and economics

The case of Greek radio landscape is clearly one of late development. The first period of radio broadcasting activity in Western societies is characterized by a perception of the medium as an instrument for the construction of national ideology as defined by the state itself and the promotion of governmental interests (van Cuilenburg & McQuail, 2008: 28-30, 32). Radio broadcasting in Greece could not provide a better confirmation to this rule. On the one hand, the introduction of public radio takes place under a dictatorial regime (1936-1941). This delayed introduction is due to the fact that the geopolitical interests of the great powers of the day (England, Germany,

⁸ One of the few examples is the project *Commedia.Net* (<http://www.commedia.net.gr/>), funded by the European Social Fund and the Hellenic Ministry of Employment and Social Protection (Community Initiative EQUAL). The project included the operation of community media centers in Athens and Thessaloniki and two multicultural web radio stations respectively, supported by the municipal radio stations in both cities and the participation of immigrants. Other examples are five or six radio stations operated by groups that define themselves as autonomous, self-organized or anarchist.

USA) postponed from 1927 to 1938 the license award to the company expected to provide the relevant technological infrastructure for the commencement of public/state radio broadcasts. On the other hand, private radio broadcasting, which is already introduced much earlier in Northern Greece in 1926 – similarly to the case of France as an example of the attempts to overcome the overt statism in the domain of wireless communication –, is suffocated by the nefarious influences of the Greek state by the late 1930s⁹. Especially in the domain of output production one has to wait until the early 1950s for the formation of professionals that employ the unique aural properties of the medium similarly to radio's heyday in the West during the Interwar period (Yiaitsis & Barboutis, 2001: 60-1, 68-9). The second phase of radio broadcasting activity as a communication policy medium, which, ideally, should be based on "sociopolitical rather than economic or national strategic concerns" (van Cuilenburg & McQuail, 2008: 34-7), simply never takes off in Greece. Radio is considered too crucial a medium for the interests of the governments of the day to be allowed to operate independently. After the introduction of the television medium – in yet another at least politically controversial era, the 1967-74 dictatorship – radio almost immediately starts to play second fiddle in the lives of the Greek people.

Nevertheless, state radio still vehemently refuses to develop a public service identity, especially as far as the production of its news output is concerned. The abolition of the state monopoly in broadcasting during the late 1980s has as its spearhead the operation of the radio medium only to confirm that the swift transition from "pirate to private" becomes the rule of the game in Greek radio. Moreover, the real stakes involve the privatization of the TV medium, in which Greek publishers are encouraged to participate by the then legislation (Act 1866/1989). What happens in reality is the expansion in the electronic media domain of wealthy businessmen, who originate not only from press and publishing enterprises, but also from shipping, construction, banking, petrol-oil and communication businesses. This minority develops close relationships with politicians and governments of the day or local authorities' officials. The ultimate result is the media interweaving with political and economic interests (the Greek word for it is "diaploki"). Moreover, when transposing this case in the radio domain, where the stakes are usually lower, one realizes why the majority of local radio stations in Greece does not operate as capitalistic enterprises with view to a profit. Instead, they serve the private economic interests of their owners and advertising is been given away as a means to offset their debts in other businesses (Heretakis, 2011: 4, 29-30; Karamanis, 2003: 122-26; Barboutis, 1997: 3).

Therefore, in the radio domain prevails at that period a *de facto deregulation* similar to the case of Italy a decade earlier. After the abolition of the established *de jure* monopoly, competition is introduced in a monopolistic market via the liberalization of broadcasting services. What's more, anomy prevails as far as licensing is concerned until today as an indirect means of the state to influence the operation of the medium. At the same time, a new type of radio broadcasting, municipal radio, is born during the deregulation period. However, it cannot evade the rule of the direct political influence of municipal authorities in its operation, it is requested by the then existing legal framework (Presidential Decree 25/1988) to directly compete with private broadcasting and never dares to built and sustain a special relationship with its local audiences through its programming output. (Antonis, 2001: 166, 171; Zaharopoulos, 2003: 237, 241) In addition, the inexistence of sustainable community radio experiments, combined with the absence of a distinct public radio broadcasting tradition and standard setting function, irrevocably mark the status of radio broadcasting in Greece. Any notion of complementarity in the operation of the public, private and non-commercial radio broadcasting tiers is outrageously missing from the current Greek radio landscape. The Greek radio broadcasting legislation is not very helpful towards this goal

⁹ In fact, if one examines the comparative data provided by Briggs regarding the penetration of radio in a pan-European context between 1938 and 1946 (Briggs, 1995[1970]: 737), out of a total of twenty three countries, only Albania and Luxemburg are left with a smaller number of radio sets on their territory when compared with Greece. Even if these data have to be treated with caution, due to the fact that this survey cannot take under account the thousands of radio sets that operate in Northern Greece between 1928 and 1936, it reveals to a staggering degree the late development of public radio in Greece.

either. It is rather trying to respond to the *de facto* evolutions in the broadcasting market¹⁰, instead of first introducing structural regulation and then pro-active policies for the attainment of public purposes in radio broadcasting.

The Greek Constitution's "paternalistic elements" evident in its Article 15 (1), i.e. the hard and fast rule of outright state intervention and control of broadcasting, were left untouched by its 2001 revision. This is simply because the political parties involved could not reach a consensus as to the extension of the guarantees enjoyed by the press (i.e. freedom from censorship and other means of prior control in Article 14) in the case of broadcasting. At the same time, however, according to the Constitutional theory, Article 15 (2) creates an equal obligation of the state to create all necessary conditions that guarantee the "triptych of objectivity, impartiality and good quality" in broadcast programming. Especially as far as the latter is concerned, broadcasters need to attain it in accordance with the "social mission of radio and television and the cultural development of the country." The National Council of Radio and Television (NCRTV) is the independent authority in charge of exercising the direct control of the state over broadcasting. Only after the enactment of Law 3051/2002 it becomes truly independent and acts as a democratically legitimate authority. (Katsirea, 2008: 60-7)

Therefore, Greece reaches today a third phase of radio broadcasting activity as a communication policy medium, which clearly involves the public embodiment of economic and consumerist values (van Cuilenburg & McQuail, 2008: 42-3), without even going through the second stage. Until the present day the NCRTV acts in the wide majority of cases as a policing authority, which imposes fines more than often in an inequitable as much as an unreasonable way. The case of an overregulated and meticulously developed legal framework is exemplified by the legislation ruling journalistic deontology and programming standards. Two NCRTV Codes of Practice (Regulations 1/1991 and 2/1991), Law 1730/87 (Article 3.2), as well as one Presidential Decree (77/2003) deal with the production of relevant broadcasting output. Most of the times, however, they are disregarded in practice by the journalists themselves. Despite the fact that legislature conceives pluralism as primarily relating to equal political representation, the NCRTV still needs to strike a balance between its policing and other regulative powers by facilitating the manifold development of pluralism. After all, with the enactment of Law 2863/2000 it acquires a sole responsibility for broadcasting matters. NCRTV, thus, needs more than ever to consider new recipes for the simultaneous engagement of all parties involved in the Greek media landscape so as to effectively advance public purposes in broadcasting matters (Katsirea, 2008).

After the end of the 1990s radio functions principally as music accompaniment in the lives of the Greek audiences. It continues, however, to retain the place of the "poor relationship" in the Greek media landscape in terms of both advertising expenditure and advertising time exposed (see Figure 2).

¹⁰ Suffice to mention that by 2005 there are thirteen relevant Laws and three Presidential Decrees enacted, also complemented by Ministerial Decisions and Guidelines of the regulatory authority (NCRTV). The ultimate result is an "overregulated and extremely detailed [legal] framework" (Katsirea, 2008: 67; Kalogirou & Sourpi, 2006: 79).

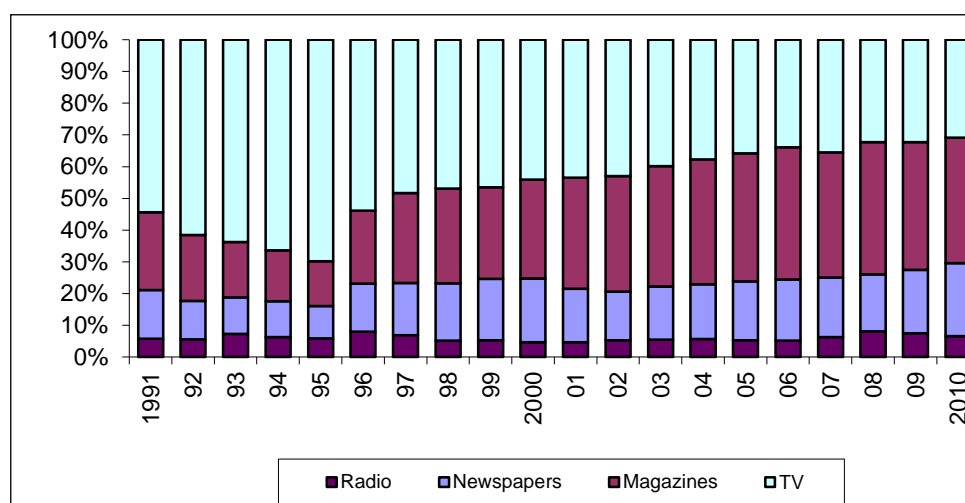


Figure 2. Percentage of advertising expenditure per medium 1991-2010 (adapted from Heretakis, 2011: 27-8; source: Media Services)

Figure 2 reveals once more radio's external competition with other media, but more staggering data available are related to the dramatic decline of advertising income by the end of the first decade of the 20th century in the Greek media landscape. Heretakis (2011: 2, 7) points out that this is an endemic phenomenon in European media landscapes, while he also states that according to general predictions the downfall of advertising expenditure will continue well after 2010. Thus, he bewares of media organizations resorting to even more blatant commercialization tactics in order to safeguard their income.

Another characteristic of the Greek radio landscape is that despite the fragmentation of its audience, it retains quite low levels of concentration. Papavasiliopoulos and Heretakis (2006: 182-3), as well as Agas, Tsourvakas and Pekaiti (2009: 114-5), underline that market concentration in the Athens area remains relatively modest until 2007 according to the relevant CR4 and HHI measurement indexes¹¹. The former authors maintain that from the late 1990s and the waning-off of the popularity of a handful of informational radios that were able to reach huge audiences (Papavasiliopoulos & Heretakis, 2006: 183)¹², the gradual ascent of music radios leads to audience fragmentation and modest levels of concentration. The latter authors point out that the low levels of concentration relate to fierce internal competition in the radio domain and, most importantly, external competition with other media. If their recommendation for the regulatory allowance of networks (the most profitable radio business along with national radio in the European landscapes) is to become sound, it must be combined with content obligations that serve the public interest. According to the experience of Western broadcasting landscapes, it still remains to test the hypothesis that the regulatory encouragement of monopolistic competition in the operation of radio networks encourages the creation of economic diversity via the promotion of exposure diversity (Barboutis, 2010: 185)¹³.

¹¹This means that detailed studies have to be undertaken in Thessaloniki and Patras the other two big Greek urban centers in the prefecture of which the biggest bulk of radio stations operate. On the other hand, since Greece still retains a considerable amount of rural population, the policy need to license the operation of regional rural radio stations remains to be confirmed.

¹²For example, see Yieroyianni: 2001: 190.

¹³Especially as far as the Greek case is concerned, radio networking has been allowed ever since the enactment of Presidential Decree 25/1988. Subsequent radio legislation failed to lay out content obligations like children's stories, news and music documentaries and radio plays, would now make even more sense, competition-wise, if introduced as part of the current digital multi-media environment (for example, Internet audio content enriched by 3D graphics and animation). Not only do they minimize external competition between different media, but they also deal sufficiently with internal competition by avoiding the "hoteling effect" – the phenomenon of stations competing by copying each other, only to produce a lowest common content denominator (cf. Heretakis, 2001: 17-9, 29-30).

In Greece, due to the fact that political pluralism is mainly conceived as equal political representation and strong local financial interests were given the ability to enter and consolidate in the Greek media landscape, there is the continuous intermingling of media, political and economic interests. The flipside of the same coin is "panpoliticismo" the phenomenon of political interests permeating all strata of social, economic and cultural life. No wonder then that the lack of independence from political and economic interests remains the most daunting characteristic of Greek radio function (Sims, 2007: 252-3; Sims, 2003: 212-3). What perseveres in the Greek case is a post-authoritarian culture in the production of programming, in which the radio system cannot safeguard the independence of radio producers to perform their tasks by serving the public interest.

The Greek media landscape in the international communication system: comparisons with east European broadcasting

General overview of comparisons

For the needs of this paper the Greek media system is compared with the ones in Bulgaria, Croatia and Hungary. The reasons are not only geographic, since this comparison covers the southern, eastern, western Balkans and neighboring CEE (Central and East European) in the north, respectively. A number of authors that deal with post-communist transformation have already suggested the feasibility of this comparison (Splichal, 1994; Splichal, 2004; Sitter 2005; Jakubowicz, 2008). Most above all there are socio-political and cultural reasons that induce this comparison relating to the ultimate prominence of politics in their media system (Hallin & Mancini, 2004: 26-32). The unavoidable result is the high degree of "systemic parallelism" due to the low degree of their media systems' democratic consolidation (Jakubowicz, 2008: 303-04).

According to Culek (2003: 116) the term "Italianization model" holds many similarities with the Croatian case, and consequently with the majority of post-communist European democracies. The reasons are fourfold:

- state control of broadcasting,
- strong degree of media partisanship,
- strong degree of integration of media and political elites,
- no real consolidation of professional journalistic ethics,

and, if we may add a fifth one, the partial only success to reform the state broadcasting system into a public one, which is combined with the notable absence of a non-commercial media tier, as a reason and explanation of the relative weakness of civil society organizations.

The Greek radio system has already been compared with the one of post-communist countries as new or forthcoming members of the EU (Barboutis & Gazi, 2003). The findings of this comparison have suggested that the combination of the centrifugal forces of EU integration and the centripetal ones of established national and international politico-economic interests lead to an ever-growing commercialization of the radio domain. It additionally has to be pointed out that the Hallin and Mancini model remains unable to account for the constant state of flux in the economic and socio-political environment that affects the operation of radio in all countries examined. This may range from "partitocrazia to formal democracy" (Jakubowicz, 2008) and from the respect to civil liberties (notably the right to freedom of expression) to their direct or indirect suppression¹⁴. Purpose of the above analysis is to show that a systemic overview of the Greek experience may have an important contribution in creating the dimensions of the future communication policies for radio in post-communist democracies in small countries.

¹⁴For example, as far as the case of Greece is concerned, a simple consultation of the Freedom House and the Reporters Without Borders annual reports seems to suffice for the confirmation of the above arguments.

Lessons of the Greek radio experience

The characteristics that the radio landscapes of post-communist countries need to acquire according to the lessons of the Greek radio experience are as follows:

- Need to reinforce the democratic culture of the media via a combination of media literacy and “command and rule” regulation measures, especially in regards to civil society organizations, the attitude of political parties and attitudes toward media journalism from the university to the everyday level.
- The application of legislation has to be monitored and offenders to be seriously penalized.
- A combination of structural and pro-active regulation which promotes public interest purposes in broadcasting needs to be developed.
- Measures to modernize public radio broadcasting need be adopted. Fragmentation of programming markets and audiences with the simultaneous aging of their traditional audiences remain the greatest obstacles for their success, which may lie in the option of developing public service (or community) networks, the case of French public radio and the community Italian one or, indeed, Spanish municipal stations.
- Complete restructuring of the internal public service radio organization with a view to effective production and exposure (i.e. programming content efficiency).
- Development of market niches so that the “quality” becomes “popular” and vice-versa via calculated risk-taking (especially when combined with audience research and radio literacy findings in relation to uncharted private radio territories).
- Independent Radio Authorities need to re-direct decision-making to the consideration and targeting of public purposes and account for weak news competition, pro-commercial attitude of small media markets and the continuous development of entertainment genres and sensationalism.
- Transparent and open decision for the public service radio (and non-commercial radio) parliamentary and government tutelage (it must not be affect at all programme-making, and introduce a clear and coherent funding strategy).

Research to be done – dimensions of a comparison

The complexities of the issues raised, suggest that there is no simple and straightforward answer to the research question whether net-only or webcasting radio services can really make a difference in the Greek case (or in similar cases in the European periphery). The short review presented above, outlines the various dimensions or aspects that should be studied to reach a consistent conclusion and to understand the main trends in the development of the new medium in the cases under discussion. These dimensions include:

- *Institutional frameworks and regulatory models.* In broad strokes, all media are affected by regulation and its implementation in a variety of ways (Albarran, 2002). For example, competition is affected by regulation concerning ownership, and economics is affected through taxation, licensing regimes and other regulatory instruments that also have an impact on barriers of entrance. The operation of any communication medium is affected by regulation on labor relations and staff composition in terms of qualifications. What’s more, regulation affects in several indirect or direct ways the content provided. For example, regulation about the freedom of speech and the work of journalists affects news media, while regulation on quotas and licensing regimes affects entertainment media. Recently, a public debate has been launched to regulate the blogosphere. Aspects of this debate in Great Britain and Greece, indicate that freedom on the Internet is neither immune nor unlimited. Besides, in the Greek case, research has shown that implementation peculiarities and complications, are related with and affected by various complexes of political and economic interests (e.g. Sims, 2003; Zaharopoulos, 2003). Implementation peculiarities and complications can also function as barriers of entrance. For example, due to immense bureaucratic obstacles, an operator might give up on setting up a traditional radio

station and turn to webcasting radio instead. Therefore, to understand the chances for the net-only radio in Greece to make a difference in comparison with the traditional radio, regulation and its implementation should be examined.

- *Market structures and business models.* Business models and market structures affect the webcasting radio chances to make a difference. Several issues like market concentration, the existence of major players and their influence, the size of the market, the barriers of entrance for both producers and consumers, competition, and other related issues determine the openness of the net-only radio world, its relations with complexes of political and economic interests (including the mainstream recording industry), and the chances to make a difference. From the point of view of a comparative analysis of webcasting business models that considers accessibility factors, content and revenue strategies, and culture (Ha & Ganahl, 2004), it may be concluded that interactivity, participation and inclusion, content diversity, and even the adoption of innovations may be affected by the model employed. Hence, this dimension should also be considered, despite the fact that several of its components like determining the shares in advertising expenditure or audience metrics are not very clear in the case of net-radio (cf. Gartley & Smith, 2006). In addition, business models and the structure of the net-only radio market in Greece, have not been studied yet.
- *Content diversity and availability.* Because democracy is guaranteed by pluralism of voices, multiplicity of choices and heterogeneity at large, diversity of content is a major issue for scholars, public authorities, political parties, media operators, organizations, and audiences. However, usually in the public discourse outside specific disciplines, diversity is considered in terms of the news and information content, rather than in terms of the entertainment and the production of culture. Strangely enough, most legislators (including the Greeks) seem to believe that there can be democracy if everyone is forced to feed on the same cultural swill produced in a single bucket. Taking into account the potential of the net-only radio to make available a wider range of content and options for a variety of audiences, and by unrelated owners, this dimension could hardly be neglected. Although it is generally accepted that the webcasting radio has added substantial diversity to the traditional radio (e.g. Compaine & Smith, 2001; Priestman, 2004), often there is a scarcity of hard evidence. Especially for musical content, assessing diversity is not an easy endeavor¹⁵. Despite the difficulties and complexities, this aspect is an indicator of the differences between the net-only and the traditional or simulcasting radio in Greece and in other similar cases. In a fully developed research scenario it may also be used as an indicator to evaluate the adoption of innovations by producers and consumers taking into account also the diversity of exposure. Finally, another aspect of this dimension concerns issues about the relationship between quality and popularity in programme making, i.e. how “the popular might become good quality and the good quality might become popular”.
- *Audience profile and fragmentation.* As already mentioned, several researchers describe some general characteristics of the net-only radio audiences, but – excluding certain audiences – there is a number of difficulties in getting detailed profiles and drawing a more or less consistent picture of audience fragmentation (cf. Gartley & Smith, 2006; Menduni, 2007; Baker, 2011). Difficulties of audience metrics have been also pointed out in the relevant literature (Gartley & Smith, 2006). Ideally, in a research to evaluate the webcasting radio as an alternative, more democratic medium, the inclusion of audiences marginalized by the traditional radio and mainstream recording industry, should be studied as well and there is already some relevant research experience on that (e.g. Tacchi, 2000). There is, of course, some research on the variability of uses and gratifications driving some groups away from the traditional radio and towards net-only radio (e.g. Albarran *et al.*, 2007; Baker, 2011). Anyway, excluding some

¹⁵See Baltzis, 2007, for more details, a literature review, and the main trends in this field.

evidence about Greek audiences outside the country, the Greek case remains unexplored in this respect so far. Clearly, audience profiles and fragmentation are viewed in the context of this paper from a sociological viewpoint; not in the sense used in marketing for commercial purposes. Understanding the scope and the size of the net-only radio, as well as the trends in its development, is important also for understanding the future of the medium.

- *Degree and types of interactivity encouraged.* By definition the net-only radio is interactive in terms of the practices it involves to access its programmes. It certainly requires a greater degree of active user involvement (cf. Priestman, 2004; Kibby, 2006; Baker, 2011). As mentioned above, the webcasting radio has also the potential of collaborative models of production, enhancing communication with the audiences, and blurring the distinction between producers and consumers, increasing audience participation and empowerment (Priestman, 2004). However, not all net-only radio stations realize this potential and – as we have seen – there are certain limits (Kibby, 2006). This may be also an indicator of the difference (if any) between traditional and webcasting radio. The degree and the types of interactivity allowed by the Greek net-only radio, then, need also to be studied and an assessment of the general trend is necessary.
- *Sociability.* The contribution of the traditional radio in the development of communities is more or less known, as it is an instrument for the construction of collective identities (national, ideological, cultural, etc.). In Greece, as in other cases, before de-monopolization the pirate radio performed important functions in social networking supporting emergent cultures or forms of counterculture (Barboutsis, 2001; Baltzis, 2010). After de-monopolization, part of these functions has been taken by private radio, especially in cases where their annexation by the mainstream industry was feasible. Municipal radio and some radio stations associated with political parties have also taken part of these functions. The encouragement of social networking (virtual or not) and of “alliances of communities” (Baker, 2011) may be another indicator to evaluate the differences (if any) between traditional and webcasting radio so as to assess the realization of its potential. The study of relations with small grassroots organizations (Priestman, 2004) or the civil society should also be included in this dimension.
- *Relations with the recording industry (and other cultural industries as well).* One of the main issues raised by webcasting radio concerns its functions in the production of culture. Baltzis (2010) has shown that the study of the net-only radio has not been fertilized yet by the long and rich tradition in the analysis of radio as co-producer of musical culture. To understand whether webcasting radio can make a difference, a more detailed study needs to be done in this direction taking into account the arguments on the likelihood for closer integration with the mainstream music industries, instead of developing an alternative medium (Priestman, 2004). The relations of radio with the recording industry and other cultural industries have been studied only partially in Greece so far. No matter how this aspect of the research may seem problematic and difficult, this dimension should not be excluded from further analysis of the methodological specifications and details from a practical point of view.
- *Relations with major news media and organizations.* The share of the news and other information content in the programmes of the Greek net-only radio has not been studied yet. Less known are the sources of this content. The use of sources other than the mainstream or not related with major news media and organizations (e.g. civil journalism), may also be an indicator of the differences between traditional (or simulcasting) and webcasting radio. These issues, however, should be included in the dimension of content diversity, described briefly above. Also, the relations of net-only radio with major news media and organizations mentioned here, concern issues of ownership.

Conclusion

Considering the restrictions of this paper, the aspects that should be studied in one or more research scenarios on the webcasting radio in Greece have been described briefly. The discussion on relevant methodological issues has not been included as it exceeds the scope and the purposes of the analysis presented here. However, the paper suggests the general outline of an approach that might be useful in other similar cases as well. As has been mentioned on several occasions during the analysis, each aspect or dimension includes several components and certainly, more than one research scenarios might be developed on this basis. Moreover, each dimension has its own difficulties to be studied in a country with a traditional scarcity of research on traditional radio. In any case, answering the question whether net-only radio can make a difference in the Greek case (and in other similar cases) or – in other words – studying the chances for the potential of the webcasting radio to be realized, is a complicated task. It is, however, a task that needs to be accomplished, if we are to understand whether webcasting radio does really worth getting the academic attention, as well as the support it needs by investors, public authorities or the civil society and, finally, in what directions this support might be. In this respect we will also hope that this discussion exceeds the borders of the Greek case to encompass other similar cases of small European countries and in particular of post-communist democracies.

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